

# Houston Area Model United Nations Specialized Committee

## ASEAN



Chair | Fred Guo  
Topic B: South China Sea Crisis  
Houston Area Model United Nations 49  
February 1 & 2, 2024

# Note to Delegates

## **Esteemed Delegates,**

My name is Fred Guo, and it's my pleasure to serve as your Chair for ASEAN for HAMUN 49! I am currently a student studying Business at UT Austin, potentially minoring in Government, and pursuing a Pre-Law track.

Now that in-person conferences are returning in full swing, I hope that every delegate can enjoy the full experience that HAMUN has to offer. You are all much luckier than me, as I attended my first two conferences through Zoom. It's wild to think how far I've come since joining our MUN in my sophomore year. In my first conference, I probably spent more time putting on my suit than actually speaking! Yet since then, I've learned to develop my public speaking skills, research acumen, and self-confidence, and more. With an active learning mindset, I became Vice President of Glenda Dawson MUN and won multiple awards, including Best Research Paper and Outstanding Delegate. I hope that this will encourage all of you to put yourselves out there and put the "U" in "MUN."

As chair, I intend to work to the best of my ability to make this conference go smoothly for all of you, delegates. However, ASEAN, as a specialized committee, will be different from the general UN committees you may be used to. Because ASEAN is an organization serving the interests of one geopolitical region, the scope and breadth of the topics will be narrower. Therefore, it's particularly important to come into the conference with a firm understanding of your nation's policy and position. Additionally, some topics may require you to explore related subjects.

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Conducting basic research into adjacent topics will put everyone on the same page and enhance the overall conference. Furthermore, while keeping in mind the gravity of the two issues at hand, I encourage everyone to think outside the box and find effective solutions that best reflect within the Indo-Pacific region. Good luck to everyone, and happy delegating!

**Fred Guo**

Chair of ASEAN

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ASEAN

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4

# What is ASEAN?

Established in 1967, the **Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)** aims to foster regional cooperation for peace, stability, and economic prosperity. In addition to its composition of ten member nations, ASEAN also includes Observer nations and ASEAN Dialogue partners at its yearly summits.

ASEAN primarily promotes economic integration and advancement of the Southeast Asian macroregion, as well as addressing national security concerns and territorial disputes. The Association also engages in dialogue with external partners on global issues like climate change and disaster relief. Through unity and shared values, ASEAN seeks to enhance the well-being of its citizens and improve the region's quality of life through regional collaboration.



[Source](#)



[Source](#)

## Executive Summary

The South China Sea is a region of strategic and economic importance. In addition to hosting a burgeoning network of international shipping, the Sea contains resources like oil, natural gas, fisheries, and more. Six countries—The Philippines, Vietnam, China, Brunei, China, and Malaysia—have staked overlapping claims in the region.

One of the main players is China with its “nine dashes” claim, covering a large swath of the sea, cementing its claims by launching artificial island reclamation projects and increasing naval surveillance.

Since 2010, the United States has spearheaded a bloc to contest China’s claims, with efforts being linked to the proximity of the South China Sea to US military bases in Taiwan. Additionally, through the Look East policy, India has also brokered deals with ASEAN member states and increased military activity in the region to counter Chinese influence.



[Source](#)

Beyond political points of interest, lack of regulation has introduced other issues, such as human trafficking and illegal shipping of drugs from increased pirate activity. Extensive overfishing and extraction of nonrenewable resources, such as petroleum and natural gas, also threatens the rich ecosystems of the waters of the South China Sea. As delegates, you must find a peaceful means to resolve the current disputes and bring peace to the Indo-Pacific region, as well as collaborating to find solutions to the mounting environmental and humanitarian crises plaguing the seas.



## Topic History

The modern day crisis has colonial roots, to when French Indochina formally claimed the most contested islands, the Paracels and Spratlys, in 1932. Imperial Japan had claimed the P&S during World War II, but the surrender of Japan during the Treaty of San Francisco in 1951 failed to delineate the status of the Paracel and Spratly Islands.

It was around the 1940s that the Nine-Dash Line was first used by first Republic of China, and then later the People's Republic of China. Although the Geneva Accords of 1954 gave South Vietnam control of the Paracel and Spratly Islands, the Vietnam War allowed the PRC's naval forces to claim these islands as a "counterattack in self-defense". The Philippines and Malaysia also claimed the Spratlys in the 1970s.

A series of skirmishes occurred between the various parties from 1988 to 2011.



[Source](#)

Beginning in 2012, the PRC militarized its island claims by constructing military buildings and conducting land reclamation projects. As of 2023, we can only see how these actions culminate into greater political developments.

## Past Solutions

Diplomacy has been attempted multiple times, either in the form of unilateral agreements such as the **Declaration of Parties** (DOC) agreement established by multiple nations in 2011 or through judiciary ruling, such as the **Philippines v. China** arbitration case heard by the United Nations in 2016, which upheld that China's claims violated the **UNCLOS** stipulations. Unfortunately, these past solutions have produced lackluster results.



## Foreign Interests

Although the United States has taken a neutral stance, recent administrations have pushed back against China's "assertive" actions in the South China Sea. In 2023, US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin has claimed that China has displayed "irresponsible behavior" in the Sea's waterways, among other statements made by high ranking American officials.

In 2015, the US began its "**freedom of navigation**" programs, sending American ships to counter "unlawful" claims to the South China Sea, including claims by China and Vietnam, which has caused protests from PRC officials.



[Source](#)

The US also has interests in The Philippines, who is in a **Mutual Defense Treaty** since 1951. It is likely that any violations of sovereignty instigated against The Philippines will cause the United States to become militarily involved as well.

## Environmental Concerns

In addition to oil and natural gas deposits, millions rely on the Sea's plentiful fisheries as a source of income.

Unfortunately, the Crisis also has the unintended side effect of depleting the fish population in the South China Sea, particularly as conflicting claims has caused a lack of oversight for illegal fishers and poachers.

State-sponsored efforts also compound the effects of overfishing. For example, China grants subsidies to fishermen who operate around the Spratlys, which pressures other governments. Some industries, like giant clam poaching, smothers the South China Seas' reefs, which causes serious changes in the Sea's overall ecosystems.





# Questions to Consider

- How can past conferences and agreements on the Crisis be improved upon?
- What role should ASEAN take in facilitating discussions among claimant states?
- How can ASEAN address the heightened militarization and island reclamation?
- What role should Observer Nations play in addressing the Crisis?
- How do we balance the livelihoods of those who rely on the Sea and the environmental concerns overfishing poses?
- How can ASEAN prevent miscommunications and skirmishes within maritime borders?



[Source](#)



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